



**MINUTES
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
May 30, 2023**

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:02 pm.

Present: Mayor: Charlie Miner; Council: Deirdre Kvale, Mike Feldmann, Jahn Dyvik (arrived a few minutes late), and Gina Joyce

Staff Present: City Administrator: Scott Weske; City Attorney: John Thames; Special Counsel: Chris Yetka (attended remotely); Fire Chief: Mike Heiland, Assistant Chief: Shane Gardner, Battalion Chief: Chris Adams, Deputy Chief of Administration: Ryan Gonsior, and Deputy Chief of Training: Cody Farley; and City Clerk: Jeanette Moeller

Absent: None

APPROVE AGENDA

A motion was made by Feldmann, seconded by Joyce, to approve the agenda as presented. Ayes: all.

OPEN CORRESPONDENCE

No one was in attendance to address the City Council during Open Correspondence.

BUSINESS ITEMS

Closed Session Pursuant to Minn. Stat. 13D.05, Subd. 3 (b): Discuss Enforcement Action Related to the Fire Services Contract

A motion was made by Kvale, seconded by Joyce, to move the meeting into a Closed Session pursuant to Minn. Stat. 13D.05, Subd. 3 (b) to discuss enforcement action related to the Fire Services Contract. Ayes: all.

A motion was made by Feldmann, seconded by Joyce, to exit the Closed Session. Ayes: all.

City Attorney Thames summarized that the City Council had just adjourned a Closed Session meeting held pursuant to Minn. Stat. 13D.05, subd. 3 (b) and staff and attorneys had been given appropriate direction from the Council.

OTHER BUSINESS

Discussion of May 18 "Follow-Up Forum" Event and May 22, 2023 Orono City Council Meeting

Mayor Miner indicated that he had heard a lot of good feedback following the May 18, 2023 forum event and stated that he believed people really appreciated the information that was presented.

City Clerk Moeller noted that she also received a few phone calls from people expressing their appreciation that the City held another open house type meeting.

Mayor Miner stated that the forum was recorded by LMCC and is available to view online for those that were unable to attend.

He reported that four of the five Council members had attended the May 22, 2023 Orono City Council meeting, and it was good to see so many residents of Orono and Long Lake as well as the firefighters in attendance.

Council member Dyvik reflected that he felt there was a lot of misinformation shared at the Orono Council meeting and questioned how the City should respond.

Mayor Miner commented that he believes it would be especially important to get accurate call-time data communicated with residents.

Chris Adams, LLFD Battalion Chief, added that he had tried to figure out how Orono staff had arrived at the times that they had quoted in their presentation but was unable to do so. He asked if, since this was public information, if the City could ask Orono for the data they used. Their presentation slide had talked about a 16-minute response time from Station 2, but from the data he has looked at the response times have been in the 11 to 12 minute range. He reiterated that despite reviewing the data, he was not able to come up with the same amount of time as they'd reported, and questioned what data was used to arrive at their conclusion.

Mayor and Council members discussed the information that was shared at the Orono City Council meeting and their collective desire to correct the information in order to alleviate concerns residents may have.

Moeller mentioned that she could look back through the slide decks from past LLFD annual report presentations to compile years of average response time information. Adams added that the years of data would actually be included in the most current year's response time slide under the notes section in the Powerpoint.

Council member Dyvik commented that he thought information should be shared for average overall response times, but also within categories like routine and emergency calls. He referenced the importance of putting out information based on factual data and not as an attempt to slant the data to 'sell' something to residents.

Mayor Miner pointed out that the information shared by Orono stating that it could take 16 minutes for Station 2 to respond if someone is having a heart attack may have put fear into the residents.

Adams offered to take a look at the data he has access to prior to next week.

Council member Dyvik recalled that beyond the misrepresentation of response times, the Orono City Council stated that they pay 85% of costs and incur 72% of the calls. He found that to be 'fuzzy' math because the call percentage included mutual aid and Minnetonka Beach information. He felt Orono had been attempting to present the information in as extreme a way as possible, and that they were trying to present the message that Long Lake was profiting from the current contracts. They did not talk about the contract formula that factors in call volume and property value. He reiterated that he felt the information shared was intended to mislead people who were not plugged into the situation.

Council member Kvale noted that most people in attendance hadn't been there for their public comment period.

Council member Dyvik reported that Orono said they had received about 100 comments from their solicitation for public comments regarding the matter; however, they only read aloud about six of them.

Mayor Miner advised that the next Orono City Council meeting will be held on June 12, 2023, and that meeting has been appropriately noticed so there can be a quorum of the Long Lake City Council in attendance as well.

Discuss Planning for Future Fire Service Collaboration with a Surrounding Fire Department(s)

Mayor Miner indicated that he would like to talk about ideas that the Fire Department leadership has for creating a strategic plan and a plan for the future of the Fire Department, to include equipment needs.

Fire Chief Heiland observed that he would like to undertake their own needs assessment. He had reviewed the assessment completed by the Wayzata Fire Department a few years ago which had included working on shared services with other departments and explained that he would like to include the firefighters in the needs assessment effort.

Cody Farley, LLFD Training Officer, voiced that he thinks it would be a great idea to have an independent third party take a look at the larger community and the resources, apparatus, and personnel that are currently in place to complete a needs assessment.

Mayor Miner recalled that he had received mixed feedback from cities who have hired outside parties to conduct their needs assessments because they were done by people who were not local community members who were plugged in to the area. He believed having a neutral party involved could potentially be a double-edged sword because there are drawbacks of having someone outside the community involved.

Farley commented on the importance of having an outside neutral party involved from his perspective, adding that it would need to be someone familiar with fire services and the entire fire industry rather than just someone who conducts business analysis, because that will make a difference in the product.

Council member Joyce suggested a phased approach where the City empowers Fire Chief Heiland and the leadership in the Fire Department to speak to neighboring chiefs and departments in order to compile information into a recommendation, with information and the recommendation to be reviewed by a third party.

Moeller asked if the State Fire Marshal's office had any resources that could possibly assist with the process.

Council member Dyvik added that perhaps it should be called something other than a needs assessment.

Council member Joyce suggested it could be called a strategic plan.

Council member Dyvik stated that if Orono is going to keep putting out misinformation like a 16-minute call response time, Long Lake needs to put out information that shows what that response time number really is.

Mayor Miner indicated that the City would be sending out a letter later this week that will update residents to explain that the City is moving on and exploring other options because Orono has not expressed interest in any of the options that had been presented.

Council member Joyce noted that she believes the letter's language will also make it clear that the City remains open to a partnership option with Orono.

Farley cautioned the Council that it would not make sense to make a decision based on emotion.

Moeller shared that she has observed the City Council's repeated offers to work on a joint option with Orono have been met with a stone wall every single time. She explained that the City has no control over Orono's unwillingness to collaborate and questioned how long they can continue to 'bash their head against the exact same wall', reflecting that it has been painful to watch from the outside. She asked how the City could move forward with someone who won't even come to the table.

Farley admitted that it would not be an easy path but he thinks that the Council also needs to question how they would be able to maintain the fire service levels that are in place today without having their current partner.

City Administrator Weske noted that he was working with Fire Chief Heiland on the projected 2024 budget, and reviewed some of the items they have been discussing related to rolling stock and facilities.

Mayor Miner voiced that he believes that there will end up being a change in the leadership in Orono in the next 18 months that may impact the situation.

Council member Kvale questioned if the needs assessment/strategic plan could account for various scenarios; for example, partnering with a larger, more urban city versus one that is more rural.

Farley added that he would also like to make sure they look at the budget from a perspective of what they can maintain on their own for staff.

The Council discussed the possibility of keeping the Department intact with the firefighters together and various pathways that may be possible in order to work towards that.

Council member Joyce commented that it is important to recognize that they have wasted a year just 'swirling' with Orono and continuing to try. There are willing communities and potential partners who want to have conversations about collaboration, but they cannot talk to Long Lake until the situation with Orono is figured out.

Farley encouraged the Council not to put the cart before the horse and to close the door with Orono if they don't know there is a promising outcome on the other side.

Council member Joyce stated that she did not think sending the letter later this week could be considered as 'closing a door'. The letter's intent is to acknowledge the options that have been put before Orono have been rejected by them, so Long Lake will move forward with a focus on the community.

Farley added that a Fire Department change is not like switching garbage companies. The City's Fire Department is well established and cannot be easily recreated. If the Council allows it to be dismantled, they should have more than just 'hope' that there is a great solution on the other side.

Council member Joyce emphasized that the Council has complete faith in the members of the Fire Department to be part of the conversation about what the future will look like moving forward.

Council member Dyvik affirmed that the Long Lake City Council has continually tried to keep the conversation moving forward despite the fact that Orono is trying to dismantle the Long Lake Fire Department. He gave the analogy that at this point it almost feels like choosing to stay in an abusive relationship and now it is time to say we need to set them aside. He added that if they want to come back to further conversation at some point, he would still be willing to listen.

Mayor Miner stated that he thinks the path for the cities will be more clearly defined following the June 12, 2023 Orono City Council meeting.

The Council discussed subjects that they would like to see included in the assessment/study of the Fire Department, and the possibility of utilizing the Open Correspondence portion of the Orono City Council meeting to state Long Lake's options and opinion.

Mayor Miner thanked the Fire Department Leadership team for their presence at the meeting.

Fire Chief Heiland indicated that he would work to have a rough draft of this information put together within a few weeks.

OTHER BUSINESS

Investments Update - Council member Kvale mentioned that there has been some interest from the public with regard to the City's investments and suggested that a representative from Oppenheimer & Co. come in and provide an overview of the investments and how they are being handled. Weske responded that he would reach out to Oppenheimer & Co. and invite them to attend an upcoming Council meeting.

ADJOURN

Hearing no objection, Mayor Miner adjourned the meeting by general consent at 7:37 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Weske
City Administrator